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SUBJECT: ROYG PAINTS ROSY PICTURE FOR VISITING STAFFDEL

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary  
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11. (U) As part of a recently negotiated MOU on Parliamentary exchange, the ROYG hosted a delegation of Congressional staffers from January 20-26. The staffdel was provided access to the cream of the ROYG's power structure. Three topics arose as central issues of the visit: Yemen's need for more international assistance; its recent reforms; and the bilateral relationship, particularly in terms of CT cooperation. The Yemeni interlocutors did an excellent job of staying on message and painted a picture of Yemen that was somewhat exaggerated in its optimism. End Summary.

A Parliamentary Exchange  
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12. (C) As a part of a recently negotiated Parliamentary exchange program, from January 20 through 26, the ROYG hosted a delegation of twelve Congressional staffers. The quality of the delegation's interlocutors showed the significance the ROYG places on the bilateral relationship with the United States in general and the success of this trip in particular. The delegation met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Planning and International Cooperation, Industry and Trade, Interior, Education and Finance. The delegation also met with the Deputy Speaker of Parliament (the Speaker of Parliament died recently and his successor has not been chosen), the head of Yemen's Supreme Court and Supreme Judicial Council, and representatives of the Shoura Council, the General Investment Authority, the World Bank, the Women's National Committee, and the Ministry of Interior's Counter Terrorism Unit. Three themes arose as the ROYG's key messages to the delegation: Yemen's poverty and need for increased assistance; reforms the ROYG has undertaken; and the bilateral relationship, particularly in terms of counterterrorism cooperation. The interlocutors generally (and certainly those from the ROYG) painted a rosy if not entirely accurate image of their country and government.

Poverty and the Need for More Assistance  
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13. (C) The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade, Planning and International Cooperation all hit on the theme of Yemen's poverty and low levels of international assistance. Foreign Minister al-Qirbi said that he feared Yemen was "lost among the wealthy states of the Gulf," and therefore was offered less aid from western countries that grouped Yemen with its rich neighbors. This was repeated by Minister of Industry and Trade al-Mutawakel and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation al-Arhabi. The three men also quoted the same assistance figure, pointing out the Yemen receives only 15 USD per capita in international assistance. All three noted that this level of assistance

might be appropriate for oil-rich Gulf countries but was absurdly low for a country as poor as Yemen.

¶4. (C) The Minister of Education noted that Yemen's education budget was only 6.1 billion USD compared to Saudi Arabia's 21 billion USD. Al-Qirbi lamented the indefinite delay of the signing of the ROYG's Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Country Plan. Deputy Parliament Speaker Raie appealed for more development assistance, saying that if the US was not going to offer (increased monetary) help it should "stop reading the newspaper and offering advice." Several interlocutors asserted that the U.S. should provide more development assistance and less military aid, reflecting a misunderstanding of the fact that the U.S. already does so. Minister of Interior al-Alimi solicited the delegation for: a) armored personnel carriers; b) radar and boats for the Coast Guard; c) funding and assistance with training and formation of additional Counterterrorism Units; and d) armored aircraft (namely helicopters) because the preponderance of weapons in Yemen allowed many to "take pot shots" at government aircraft.

#### Progress on Reform

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¶5. (C) Deputy Speaker Raie lauded the transparency of Yemeni democracy, the independence of its judiciary, the budget process, and oversight between different branches of the ROYG. The Minister of Finance said reform was important and pressure should continue to be put on the ROYG, but he also said that things were improving with the procurement law and the establishment of the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption and its program of mandatory financial disclosure for government officials. The Minister of Planning and International Cooperation also lauded this particular reform. Salah al-Attar of the General Investment Authority also highlighted current reform projects and stressed his optimism for the future.

¶6. (C) Raie said parliament was debating a bill to reform the Supreme Council on Elections and Referenda (SCER), but noted that the opposition seemed to waver on the specifics of what reform it wants for that body. He also noted that proposed constitutional amendments called for the election of local councils and council heads and an elected Shoura council.

#### The Bilateral Relationship and CT Cooperation

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¶7. (C) The Minister of Finance told the delegation that Yemen is a unique democracy, one that is paying the price for embarking on this democratic exercise. He urged the delegates to visit often and to see the many opportunities for investment. The Women's National Committee, a quasi-NGO that is closely tied to the ruling General People's Congress, complained that women's rights cases that catch U.S. and international attention do not characterize women's problems in Yemen. The committee members went on to say that the US should ratify various international conventions before advising other countries on women's issues.

¶8. (C) On the topic of counterterrorism cooperation, both the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and the head of Yemen's Supreme Court noted that Yemen has been a victim of terrorism since before 9/11. Brigadier General Yahya Abdullah Saleh of the Ministry of Interior's Central Security Organization's Counterterrorism Unit (CTU) gave a detailed presentation to the delegation on his U.S.-funded force.

¶9. (C) Several interlocutors touched on the outstanding issue of convicted USS Cole bombing conspirator Jamal al-Badawi. Foreign Minister al-Qirbi complained that the bilateral relationship should not hinge on a single issue, a formulation he has used before when talking about Badawi. Senior Presidential Advisor AbdulKarim al-Iryani stressed that extraditing Badawi would violate the Yemeni constitution. (Note: This has been the ROYG's position for some time. End Note.)

